



TIMOTHY C. BOYCE
State Forester

I recently attended the Alabama Interagency Wildland Fire Academy training session in Shelby County. Before I got there I really didn't know what to expect, but when I left I was impressed with not only the efforts that went into organizing and putting on such a large event, but I also realized the impact this training would have on the many Alabama communities and cities represented.

Over 140 wildland and structural firefighters from 22 paid and volunteer fire departments, state and federal agencies and forest industry attended this training course. It was the first of its kind held in Alabama and took place May 11-20 at the Head-Cleveland Farm, TREASURE Forest of retired federal judge Melford Cleveland.

The number of participants was evidence that the training offered was much needed. Although many of the attendees were from structural fire departments, the need for wildland fire training has in recent years become more important because of the increasing occurrence of wildfires in heavily populated areas. These men and women received certified training from some of the most qualified instructors in the state and they will be able to carry this knowledge back to their communities where they can be instrumental in providing better fire service to the citizens they serve.

The 10-day training course was developed and coordinated by the Jefferson-Shelby Wildland-Urban Interface Advisory Board. This group has been active for years in planning and providing education of wildland-urban interface in the Jefferson and Shelby county areas. They brought together many agencies and companies who provided resources and services to make this much needed and vital training a reality.

The success of this fire-training academy proved there is a hunger for these firefighters to receive more knowledge and experience. In the 2000 wildfire, season Alabama had over 6,500 wildfires that burned approximately 89,000 acres. Many of the firefighters that participated in this training were part of the force that responded to these wildfires. It is important that these firefighters received the best training possible in order for them not only to do their job in the best and most safe manner, but that they are able to provide the people in the communities, towns and cities they represent the best fire protection possible.

The Alabama Forestry Commission was one of the sponsors of the event this year and I have already pledged our support for another edition of the same training to be held next year. I urge other agencies and companies to also take part in making this training possible so that together we can make Alabama a better place today and in the future.